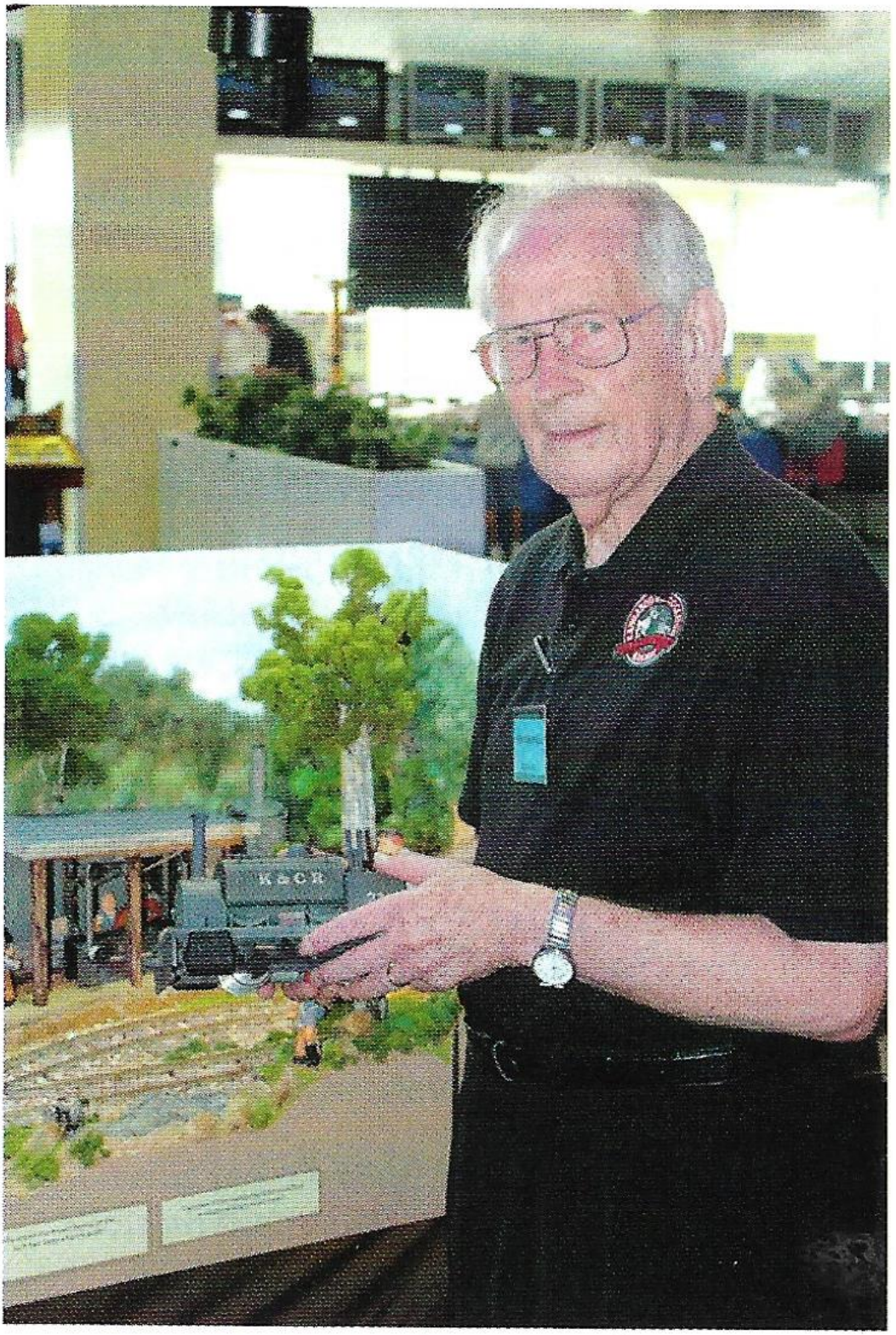

Rev Dr Vern Cracknell MMR 567

I have often wondered what influences in my life directed me to an interest in

modeling railways, to the point where it has become a dominant pursuit amongst my daily routines.

I vividly recall the experience on a scout hiking and camping trip with another scout when we were able to stand on the footplate of a mountain-type locomotive hauling a goods train from Willunga to Mile End, in South Australia. We were in our mid-teens and had mistakenly read the passenger train timetable, arriving in the evening when the passenger train was not to leave until the next morning. The goods train crew spotted our dilemma and said, "You can stay in the crew quarters with us tonight, and if you want to you could come with us on the footplate. We'll slow down for you to get off at Oaklands." That was a most memorable experience.

But it may have been the model tinplate, three-rail circle which our father had mounted on a framed board when my brother Peter and I were still at primary school. This was in the early war years when toys were in short supply. This was O gauge, with batteries secured beneath the board, which had run out by the evening of Christmas Day. My father's radio business friend solved this battery problem with a workshop-built transformer.

No doubt a significant gift came in my mid-teens when my uncle gave me a Hornby O-gauge locomotive, rolling stock, and tin plate track already well used. It could be packed in a bag and taken to friends' places, laid out on garden paths, with afternoons spent on working our trains. The locomotive, tender, and several remaining pieces of rolling stock sit on a shelf in my train room.

There must be some lasting influence of our father's decision to build a platform on our galvanized ironside fence so that as toddlers Peter and I could climb to watch the trains coming and going at Oaklands station some 400 meters away. There were no houses then to block the view.

During secondary school years, there was the daily trip to school in the Adelaide CBD with the question as we waited on the platform, "What will haul the train today?" The answer was either an F Class steam locomotive (I always thought this was an elegant engine) or perhaps the first of the diesels in the South Australian Railways as a shunter. These were times of severe coal strikes in Australia, so even the F Class locomotives were converted to oil-burning.

I recall a sense of frustration when we bought one of our sons, Paul, a train set for a birthday present. That set received much use. We increased the amount of track, built a foam tunnel and mountain, made a bigger board, and that train was worked almost to its death. The frustration for me was that my work as a minister in a parish was demanding and time was severely limited. I wanted to do more.

So these must have been some of the influences leading to my strong railway interest. They represent pleasant memories, but modeling railways still lay in the future.

It was two or three years after my wife's illness and death in 1992 that model railways became a therapeutic, rewarding, and constructive pursuit. I was still working as a lecturer, but here was a purposeful way to be creative, solve problems, and learn new skills. I told my children that when I retired, I would take up modeling railways when the time was right. So one Father's Day, my younger son Paul (who had received the birthday present years before) gave me a transformer and a controller with the statement, "Put these in the cupboard, and when you are ready, get out my old train and get started." So it happened that I returned to modeling railways well before retirement.

After several years working on the home layout (HO scale), it was time to venture into the exhibition scene. This has had the added benefit of travel to many shows, particularly in South Australia and Victoria. In total, four different layouts have been exhibited, two in HO and one "Kangaroo and Cockatoo Railway" in G gauge has been shown some 47 times. An out-station of the K&CR, "Magpie Glen" (also in G), is still being exhibited.

I joined the NMRA late in my model railway journey. Of course, I had read about its existence and the standards that the organization has helped develop. Although I had come to know many modelers through the exhibition experience, I had been a private modeler and had never belonged to a club. Perhaps it was time to seek a new avenue for friendships with like-minded folk. I was attracted by the notion that NMRA membership did not involve working on a club layout. (I think I am too independent and too keen to see results to be happy with a layout project that is managed by a committee!)

I remain forever grateful to my older son Dale, who is an excellent controller of trains and helped me stage exhibits, especially interstate, and in latter times my brother Peter, who has done likewise, and to a team of helpers who have assisted with loading and unloading of layouts through all the years of exhibitions. They have not been modelers (except one) but have helped the hobby and myself out of the goodness of their hearts. My daughters Lisa (who lives in a nearby suburb) and Mary (who lives on the other side of the continent) seem well pleased that their father has a worthwhile hobby that keeps him well occupied.

Sharing s of Kangaroo and Cockatoo Railway with some members encouraged me to begin the Achievement Program. This has been a stimulating experience. Many aspects of the program were able to assess work already done, and self-evaluation and descriptions of how problems were solved have all proved of value. The process of documentation has also been an enjoyable aspect. Some new projects have helped hone skills.

To successfully complete the Achievement Program has been personally rewarding and satisfying. Membership of my Division is important — it leads me to appreciate the breadth of knowledge and experience that come to the fore when keen modelers from different gauges, styles, and particular modeling approaches come together. For example, modelers may say the layout's emphasis is "telling stories" or perhaps "depicting a historical time and place," or "demonstrating railway practices." And there are other approaches too. We teach and learn from each other, which is one of the great benefits of the NMRA.

I started the Achievement Program late in life, but young in NMRA membership. I am pleased and satisfied on all counts. There is still much to learn, to try, and lots to experience and enjoy.

AP Certificates
Rev Dr Vern Cracknell

Master Builder – Cars
Master Builder – Motive Power
Model Railroad Engineer – Electrical
Master Builder – Scenery
Master Builder- Structures
Model Railroad Author
Model Railroad Engineer - Civil